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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
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R 021800Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4134
INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 2837

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PINR EC
SUBJ: ECUADOREAN POLITICS: MOVE TO DISQUALIFY
BUCARAM FAILS--OTHER RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

REF: (A) QUITO 2255; (B) QUITO 2341

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: BUCARAM'S POLITICAL FUTURE WAS THREATENED BY A MOVE IN THE FIRST COMMISSION TO EXCLUDE HIM FROM PRESIDENTIAL ELIGIBILITY, BUT THE EFFORT WAS DEFEATED. THE FIRST OF THE RUMORED PARTY ALLIANCES IS SIGNED WHILE EX-PRESIDENTS ARE GIVEN A NEW LEASE ON THEIR POLITICAL LIFE. RECEDULATION IS GETTING ITS SECOND WIND. THE FORMER AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON IS TESTING HIS POLITICAL WINGS. END SUMMARY.

2. THREAT TO BUCARAM. ON APRIL 15 THE FIRST COMMISSION VOTED 6-5 TO EXCLUDE FROM THE PRESIDENCY ALL DUAL NATIONALS. THIS MOVE WAS OBVIOUSLY AIMED AT DISQUALIFYING POPULIST POLITICIAN ASAAD BUCARAM, WHOSE PARENTS WERE BORN IN LEBANON. THE COMMISSION'S DECISION WAS MADE POSSIBLE ONLY THROUGH THE VOTES OF THREE ALTERNATE DELEGATES WHO WERE VOTING IN PLACE OF THREE PRINCIPALS WHO WERE OUT OF THE COUNTRY. UPON RETURN OF THE PRINCIPALS A SUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO RESCIND THE DISQUALIFICATION
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WAS BEGUN WHICH WAS INTERRUPTED BY INTENSE DEBATE AND A BOYCOTT OF THE COMMISSION ACTIVITIES BY THE ANTI-BUCARAM GROUP. THE DISQUALIFICATION WAS VOTED DOWN APRIL 18.

COMMENT: THE FIRST COMMISSION ORIGINALLY ESTABLISHED VERY GENERAL REQUIREMENTS THAT PERMITTED BUCARAM TO RUN. THE TEMPORARILY SUCCESSFUL REVERSAL OF THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AFTER

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SEVERAL UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORTS DEMONSTRATES THE STRENGTH AND PERSISTENCE OF THE ANTI-BUCARAM FORCES. WELL PLACED SOURCES ALSO INDICATE THAT THE SECOND COMMISSION INTENDS TO DISQUALIFY BUCARAM THROUGH ELIGIBILITY PROVISIONS. THOSE GROUPS WORKING TO OPPOSE BUCARAM AT THE CONSTITUTIONAL LEVEL APPARENTLY BELIEVE THAT HE CANNOT BE BEATEN ELECTORALLY AND THAT ANY REACTION HE CAN MOBILIZE CAN BE SUCCESSFULLY WEATHERED. THOUGH IT WILL NOT BE CERTAIN UNTIL THE COMMISSIONS OFFICIALLY END THEIR WORK, IT APPEARS NOW THAT ONE DRAFT CONSTITUTION WILL PERMIT BUCARAM TO RUN AND THE OTHER WILL MAKE HIM INELIGIBLE. THE REFERENDUM WOULD THUS TEST BUCARAM'S STRENGTH PRIOR TO ACTUAL PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.

3. POLITICAL PARTY ALLIANCE. ON APRIL 15, THE LIBERAL PARTY ANNOUNCED THE SIGNING OF AN ALLIANCE WITH A BRANCH OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY. THIS FIRST OFFICIALLY CONSUMMATED ALLIANCE IS EXPECTED TO BECOME THE NUCLEUS OF A COALITION THAT WILL INCLUDE THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES (CONSERVATIVES, ARNE, ETC.), WHICH HAVE ALREADY EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN JOINING SUCH AN ALLIANCE.

COMMENT: THE LIBERAL PARTY, ATTEMPTING TO PRESENT A POLITICALLY POPULAR CENTER-LEFT FACE AFTER SUFFERING ACCUSATIONS OF BEING CONSERVATIVE IN NATURE, HAVE ALIGNED THEMSELVES WITH THE SOCIALISTS TO ESTABLISH THEIR CENTER-LEFT CREDENTIALS. THE SOCIALISTS, A DIVIDED GROUP, WILL NOT CONTRIBUTE ELECTORAL STRENGTH TO THE COALITION BUT BROADEN ITS APPEAL. SINCE THE APPARENT PURPOSE OF THE POLITICAL PARTY ALLIANCES IS TO COMBAT THE BUCARAM CANDIDACY, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT SUCH ALLIANCES COULD BE SUSTAINED WERE BUCARAM DISQUALIFIED BY BOTH COMMISSIONS.

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4. EX-PRESIDENTS. IN A MOVE THAT ADDS AN ASSORTED BAG OF CANDIDATES TO THE RING, THE FIRST COMMISSION HAS REVERSED ITS EARLIER DISQUALIFICATION OF THE CANDIDACIES OF FORMER PRESIDENTS. THERE WILL BE NO FUTURE PRESIDENTIAL RE-ELECTION BUT THE PROVISO WILL NOT BE RETROACTIVE.

COMMENT: MANY OF THE PARTIES OF PREVIOUS PRESIDENTS HAD BEEN IN OPPOSITION TO THE RETURN PLAN BECAUSE OF THE THE RE-ELECTION PROHIBITION. BY SIMULTANEOUSLY ATTEMPTING TO DISQUALIFY BUCARAM AND REVERSE ITS EARLIER DISQUALIFICATION OF FORMER PRESIDENTS, THE COMMISSION PROBABLY HOPED TO MINIMIZE POLITICAL OPPOSITION. THE ATTEMPTED STRATEGY APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE, AT LEAST NUN PART; THE VELASQUISTAS, FORMALLY UNEQUIVICAL OPPONENTS OF THE PLAN, HAVE NOW SAID THEY MAY CONSIDER PARTICIPATION IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM.

5. RECEDULATION. AFTER GALO PLAZA'S ANNOUNCEMENT (SEE REF A) OF A POSSIBLY DELAY IN RECEDULATION (ISSUING OF I.D. CARDS) WHICH WOULD CAUSE A DELAY IN THE RETURN OF A CONSTITUTIONAL

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GOVERNMENT, THE GOE WAS ACCUSED OF BAD FAITH. IN AN ATTEMPT TO REGAIN PUBLIC CONFIDENCE, THE GOE ANNOUNCED A CONCERTED EFFORT TO ACCELERATE THE PROCESS.

COMMENT: PUBLIC CONFIDENCE HAS APPARENTLY BEEN RESTORED AS MORE EQUIPMENT AND LARGER STAFFS HAVE BEEN ADDED TO SPEED UP THE ISSUANCE OF NEW I.D.'S.

6. CARDENA'S HAT IN THE RING. THE RUMORED POLITICAL AMBITIONS OF THE PREVIOUS ECUADOREAN AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON, JOSEAC. CARDENAS, HAVE APPARENTLY COME TO FRUITION WITH THE FORMATION THIS WEEK OF THE PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL FRONT (DIRECTED BY CARDENAS). THE "FRONT" PUBLISHED A DETAILED MANIFESTO OUTLINING ITS POSITION (PROGRESSIVE:MODERATE) ON THE GAMUT OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES.
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